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AZERBAIJAN

SUCCESS STORY

Improving Child Survival and Health

Village health educators save lives and strengthen communities



Health educator Nargiz Askarova (second from right) meets with village mothers and caretakers whom she assists under a USAID-funded child survival program.

When a new mother had trouble feeding her baby, Nargiz Askarova used her USAID-sponsored training to teach her techniques for feeding the newborn. The infant returned to full health within days.

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Word spread quickly that Pakiza, a new mother, was in trouble. From neighbor to neighbor, over tea and across fences, the women of Siriq village shared the news that young, 19-year-old Pakiza was having trouble breastfeeding her baby. Her child, Fatima, was still under 40 days old and the only source of nourishment she knew was her mother's milk. Now Fatima was feverish and sickly. Concern spread about the plight of this new mother. When word reached Nargiz Askarova, the village health educator, she did not relay the news to her neighbors. She took action.

Nargiz had completed a rigorous training course on breastfeeding through a USAID-funded project called the Child Survival Program. As a village health educator, she had already undergone several months of training on a range of health issues and care strategies. Now she had an opportunity to put her new knowledge to work.

Arriving at Pakiza's home, Nargiz examined the mother's swollen and sore breasts. In a reassuring tone, she soothed Pakiza and helped the young mother find the best position for feeding. Nargiz stayed with Pakiza and offered gentle advice until her baby began nursing. Within a few days, little Fatima once again resembled the healthy baby she was meant to be.

Nargiz is proud of the role she plays helping Pakiza and other mothers in her village. When first approached by staff from the Child Survival Program, Nargiz jumped at the chance to learn and work more closely with children and their mothers.

The program identifies isolated villages of southern Azerbaijan and targets them for health training. Volunteers like Nargiz receive training and then begin providing critical health information and preventive services to communities that are located far from standard healthcare facilities.

Now fully trained, Nargiz is sharing lessons that are strengthening the health of her village, from neighbor to neighbor.

Photo: Mercy Corps